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ABSTRACT

This performance guide is designed for teachers to use with students before and after a storytelling performance of "Coyote and Spider Woman and Other Creation Stories," by Geri Keams, a Navajo storyteller. The guide, called a "Cuesheet," contains seven activity sheets for use in class, addressing: (1) The Storyteller Tells Her Story (where the storyteller describes the importance of storytelling as she was growing up and discusses her work); (2) Telling Stories (discussing why tell stories, what makes good storytelling--including words, voice, facial expressions, and body movements, and listeners who are partners--and what makes a story worth telling); (3) The Stories (providing some information about two stories and offering a Venn diagram for story discussion); (4) Picturing a Story (with an illustration activity for students based on the performance they attended); and (5) What Did You Learn? (an activity sheet to show what students learned about Native Americans from listening to these stories). Resources for further exploration are listed. (SR)

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Geri Keams: "Coyote and Spider Woman and Other Creation Stories." Cue Sheet.

by Gail Carr

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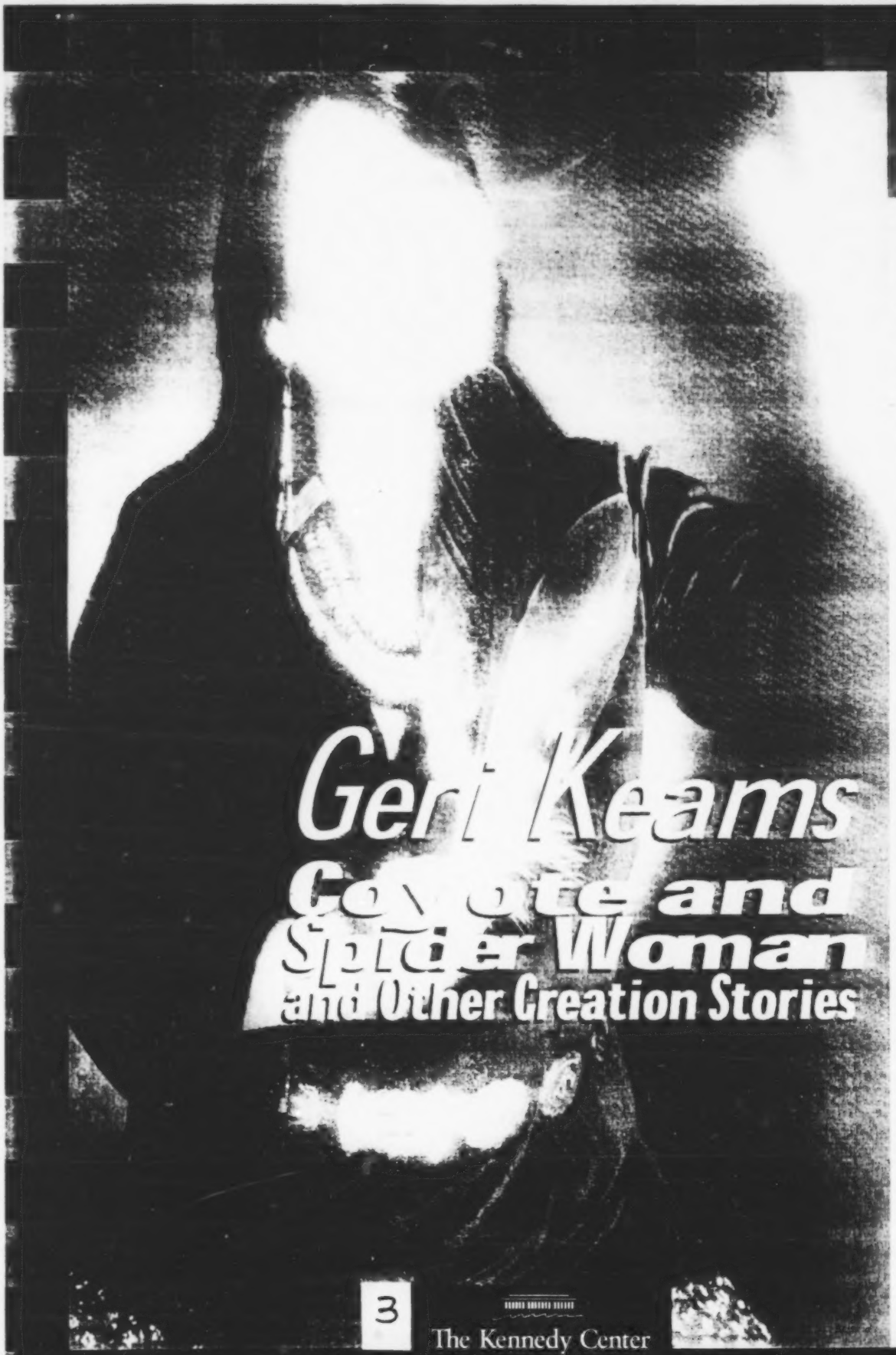

CUE SHEET

WELCOME TO CUESHEET, a performance guide published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. This *Cuesheet* is designed for you to use before and after a storytelling performance of *Coyote and Spider Woman and Other Creation Stories* by Geri Keams, a Navajo storyteller.

What's in Cuesheet?

The Storyteller Tells Her Story, *pages 2 –3*

Telling Stories, *pages 4 –5*

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Picturing a Story, *page 7*

What Did You Learn? *page 8*

Resources, *page 8*

Geri Keams

Coyote and Spider Woman and Other Creation Stories

The Kennedy Center

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The Storyteller Tells Her Story

Meet Geri Keams
a "Weaver of Words"

I was born and raised on the Navajo Nation in the Painted Desert region of Arizona. (The government called this a reservation.) I belong to the Streak-of-Black-Forest Clan. I am the oldest of nine brothers and sisters. My grandmother, a storyteller and rug weaver, was a great influence on me. She taught me the importance of remembering and carrying on our ancient tribal stories and chants. Winter was storytelling time, and my grandmother made us travel to the homes of others, sometimes walking two or three miles, to hear their stories.

In addition to being a storyteller, I am an actress. I was in a movie, *The Outlaw Josie Wales*, with Clint Eastwood. I have been in TV movies and series such as *Northern Exposure*. I also starred in a children's television film, *The Secret of Lizard Woman*.

I perform at schools, museums, churches, and performing arts centers all around the United States. I love telling stories, because it gives me the chance to combine the traditions of my Navajo ancestors with my life today.

I have published several poems, as well as a children's book, *Grandmother Spider Brings the Sun*.

I graduated from the University of Arizona, where I studied Drama Education.

I live in Los Angeles, California, and I'm president of my own company, Hozhoni Productions. Hozhoni is a Navajo word that means "the beauty way"—a way of balance and harmony. I help the "storytellers" of Hollywood by suggesting how they should show Native Americans in their movies and on TV. I have worked on TV shows like *Beverly Hills 90210*, *The X-Files*, and *Profiler*. I also helped with the Disney movie *Pocahontas*. I made suggestions about Pocahontas's family, and about her tribe's opinion of the European settlers. At the end of the movie credits, you can find my name!

FACT SHEET 4 Telling Stories

Why Tell Stories?

All Native American tribes have legends and stories that were told to explain things that people didn't understand, such as earthquakes, storms, and seasons. Creation stories explain the origins of the earth, sun, moon, stars, and all of nature. Other stories tell about gods and heroes, and remind people about how they should act and the rules they should follow. Some stories are told just for fun, while others teach lessons, or morals. Through stories, each generation passes its religion, ideas, and traditions to the next generation. Native American tales give information about how and where a tribe lived, the foods they ate, and how they got their food.

What Makes Good Storytelling?

When the members of a tribe meet and sit in a tribal circle, the storyteller's place is one of honor. The storyteller's job is to pass traditions and history, through stories, from one generation to the next.

Words

A storyteller's tools are words. Geri Keams works with words to create moods, and to help you imagine pictures, called images, in your mind.

During her performance, listen carefully to the words. How do they help you picture the story in your mind?

Voice, Face, and Movement

Storytellers use their voices, facial expressions, and body movements to make stories more interesting and to express the moods and feelings in stories. A storyteller does not memorize a story word-for-word. The stories can change slightly with each telling.

Watch storyteller Geri Keams carefully. See if you notice examples of how and when she makes her storytelling interesting by using her voice, face, or body.

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Listeners Who Are Partners

Storytelling is a shared experience. It's a partnership between the storyteller and the listener. As the listener, you agree to be a partner in the storytelling. Listening to stories is different from watching TV or a movie. You are in the same room with the storyteller. Inappropriate talking and noise can distract the storyteller and disturb other audience members.

Help Geri Keams by listening and watching carefully. If you are asked to participate, join in! Laugh if something is funny. Applaud for the stories you like. Have fun and enjoy being a storytelling partner with Geri Keams!

What Makes a Story Worth Telling?

- A good story keeps your attention.
- Usually, the story is short.
- Its characters and events are interesting.
- It has a problem, or conflict, which must be solved.
- Something unexpected often happens—a surprise —that keeps listeners interested.
- Many stories have a lesson, or moral, which teaches something about life.
- A good story makes you think.

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6 The Stories

Here is some information about two of the stories that Geri Keams might "weave with words" in her performance.

Grandmother Spider Brings the Sun

A Cherokee Creation Story

At one time, the animals lived in a world that was cold and dark. In this story, they plot to find a way to bring heat and light to their world. Many different animals try and fail. Wise Grandmother Spider finds a way.

Can you predict how she might succeed?

Coyote Brings Fire to the Animals

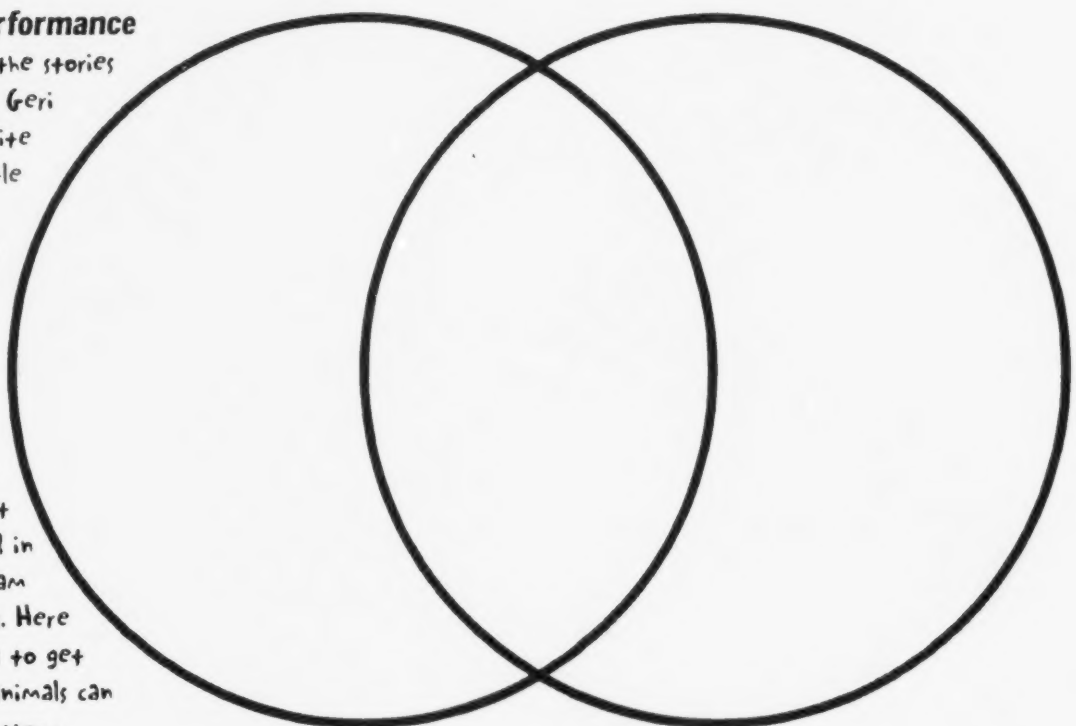
A Navajo Creation Story

Coyote is a "trickster" character. He is a clever rascal, but sometimes his greediness gets the best of him. This story also finds the animals in a cold and dark world. They tell Coyote that some creatures stole their fire and are holding it at the top of the world. Coyote gets help from an unlikely source—some magical berries he once swallowed. The berries talk to him, and give him advice!

What advice do you think the berries might give?

After The Performance

Recall two of the stories that you heard Geri Keams tell. Write each story's title in the spaces provided below the Venn diagram. What elements of the stories are alike? What is different about each story? Fill in this Venn diagram with your ideas. Here are 3 elements to get you started: • animals can talk • creation story • trickster character



Story 1:_____ **(title)** **Story 2:**_____ **(title)**

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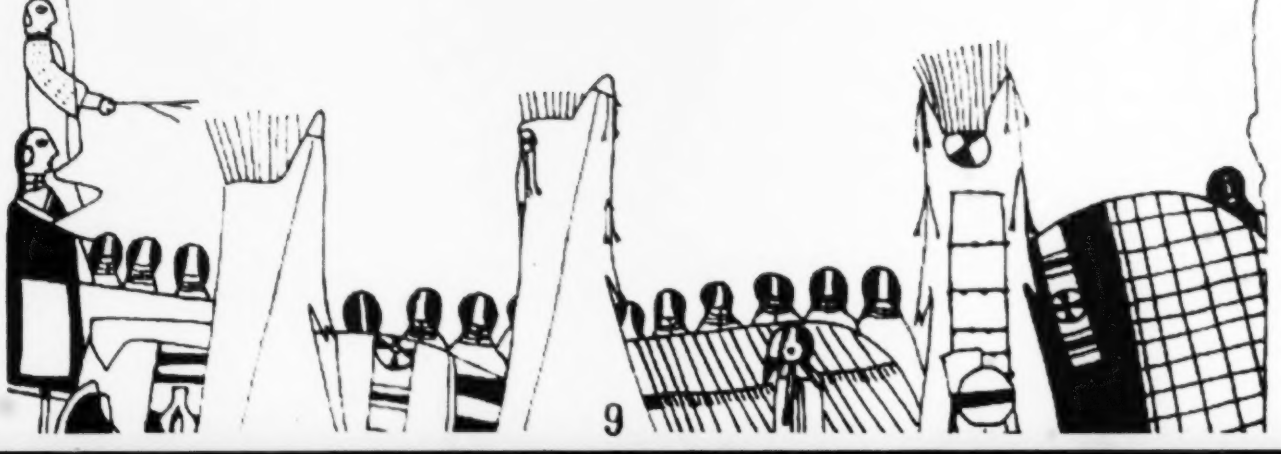
After the Performance

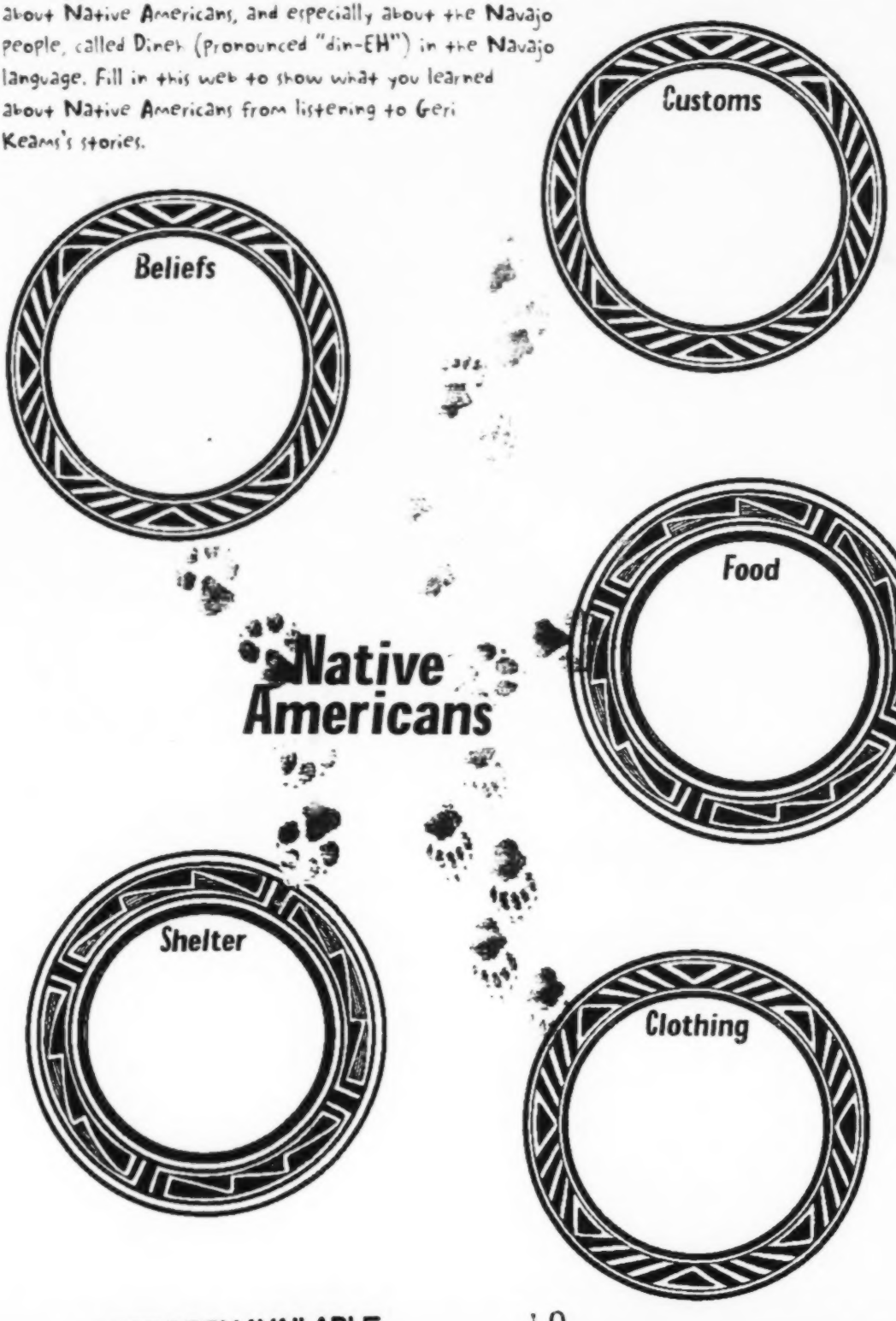
If you and the storyteller have succeeded as partners, you should have pictures in your mind (images) of the stories you heard. Choose one of the stories that Geri Kearns told, and illustrate a favorite part of it below. Include as many details as you can remember. Write a caption for your illustration and share your drawing with friends or classmates.



What Did You Learn?

After the Performance:

One reason that Geri Keams tells stories is to teach people about Native Americans, and especially about the Navajo people, called Dineh (pronounced "din-EH") in the Navajo language. Fill in this web to show what you learned about Native Americans from listening to Geri Keams's stories.



More Stories:

If you would like to read some Native American stories, try...

Navajo: Visions and Voices Across the Mesa by Shonto Begay

Remaking the Earth: A Creation Story from the Great Plains of North America by Paul Goble

Coyote Walks on Two Legs: A Book of Navajo Myths and Legends retold by Gerald Hausman

Grandmother Spider Brings the Sun by Geri Keams

Coyote Goes Walking retold and illustrated by Tom Pohrt

In a Circle Long Ago: A Treasury of Native American Lore from North America by Nancy Van Laan

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